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California's Natural Wildlands Legacy

Mojave Desert

Bureau of Land Management
California

Often called the "high desert," the Mojave Desert lies between the Colorado Desert to the south, the Sierra Nevada Mountains to the northwest and the Great Basin to the east. While the word "desert" usually brings to mind images of vast, contiguous expanses of sand and barren terrain, a wide variety of wildlife and vegetation flourish throughout this region.

The Mojave Desert is a rich tapestry of vast landscapes, significant historic and prehistoric cultural resources, unique wildlife and plant assemblages, and majestic wilderness. Railroads and transmission lines stretching from the Colorado River to the Los Angeles basin are seen throughout the Desert. Cattle, wells, corrals, and fences built to facilitate ranching also dot the landscape. Ancient petroglyphs left by early inhabitants appear on rocks and canyon walls. Trails of early Spanish explorers and migrating settlers, remains of mining camps, and traces of General George Patton's WWII desert warfare training area are more of the historic sites providing an important legacy of more than 10,000 years of human occupation in North America.

Encompassing portions of both the Mojave and the Colorado deserts, Congress created the 25-million acre California Desert Conservation Area in 1976. To meet the challenges of managing such a diversity of resources in a region of intense population pressures, BLM is preparing four major ecosystem management plans to update and amend the CDCA Plan.

Watchable Wildlife

Established by BLM with the assistance of the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc., the Desert Tortoise Natural Area

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(DTNA) and Watchable Wildlife Area encompasses more than 25,500 acres of federal, private and state lands. The DTNA protects desert tortoise habitat in its natural state, free from conflicting land uses. Scientists from throughout the United States conduct extensive research on tortoises within the natural area to learn more about the diseases that have decimated tortoise populations. Spring (mid-March to late May) is the best time of the year to visit the area.

River of Life

The sound of a stream rippling over rocks beneath the rustling leaves of a tall cottonwood tree at Sand Canyon or the presence of permanent flowing water at Amargosa Canyon are not the usual image people associate with the Mojave Desert. The steep, rugged walls of Afton Canyon were carved by the forces of nature thousands of years ago, and the process slowly continues as the Mojave River gently flows through the canyon. Afton Canyon is one of the few places in the desert where the river flows on the surface. These areas provide important sanctuary from the searing heat for plants, animals and humans.

Shifting Sands

A virtual geological display, the many natural Mojave Desert features draw thousands of visitors each year. Created over 20,000 years ago, the Fossil Falls is a remnant of a waterfall created when lava poured into the Owens River channel. Erosion carved the lava into a series of smooth, rounded features visible today. More than 500 calcium carbonate spires rising from the Searles Dry Lake basin form the the Trona Pinnacles. Formed underwater nearly 10,000 years ago, some of the pinnacles rise as high as 240 feet. Visible from historic Route 66, Amboy Crater stands alone in an ancient lavabed. The 250-foot high crater is a near perfect example of a volcanic cinder cone.

Riding the Sand

There are several popular off-highway vehicle recreation areas in the Desert to accommodate motorcycles, ATVs, sand rails, and four wheel-drive vehicles. The spectacular 400-foot high sand dunes at Dumont Dunes or the open desert riding at Spangler Hills, Jawbone and Dove Springs, Stoddard Valley, Johnson Valley, El Mirage and Rasor all provide excellent opportunities for superior OHV recreation.

Surfing the Wind

Some of the most popular recreation sites in the high desert are El Mirage Dry Lake Recreation Area and Ivanpah Dry Lake. The frequent windy conditions and the flat, hard surfaces provide excellent opportunities for wind-dependent recreation. The uniqueness of the area also attracts many commercial photography, film and television endeavors.

Preserving America's Freedom

From 1942 to 1944, the deserts of southern California and Arizona became a training ground for the largest military training exercise of its time. Under the command of Major General George S. Patton, Jr., a million American soldiers trained at the 12 base camps - collectively known as the Patton Camps - from which they conducted large-scale maneuvers. Remnants of the camps can still be seen throughout portions of the Desert.

"To the north I looked out over the Mojave Desert...from this point a wilderness of mountains, arid, aerial, almost phantasmal. 'Come,' they seemed to say, 'we are waiting for you, have waited since eternity began.'"

J. Smeaton Chase, California Desert Trails, 1919

Your lands....*Your legacy!*

The Desert Tortoise Natural Area protects desert tortoise habitat in its natural state

The steep rugged walls of Afton Canyon were carved by nature more than 15,000 years ago

The flat, smooth unobstructed playa at Ivanpah Dry Lake attracts thousands of wind-dependent recreationists every year

Goals for the Mojave Desert

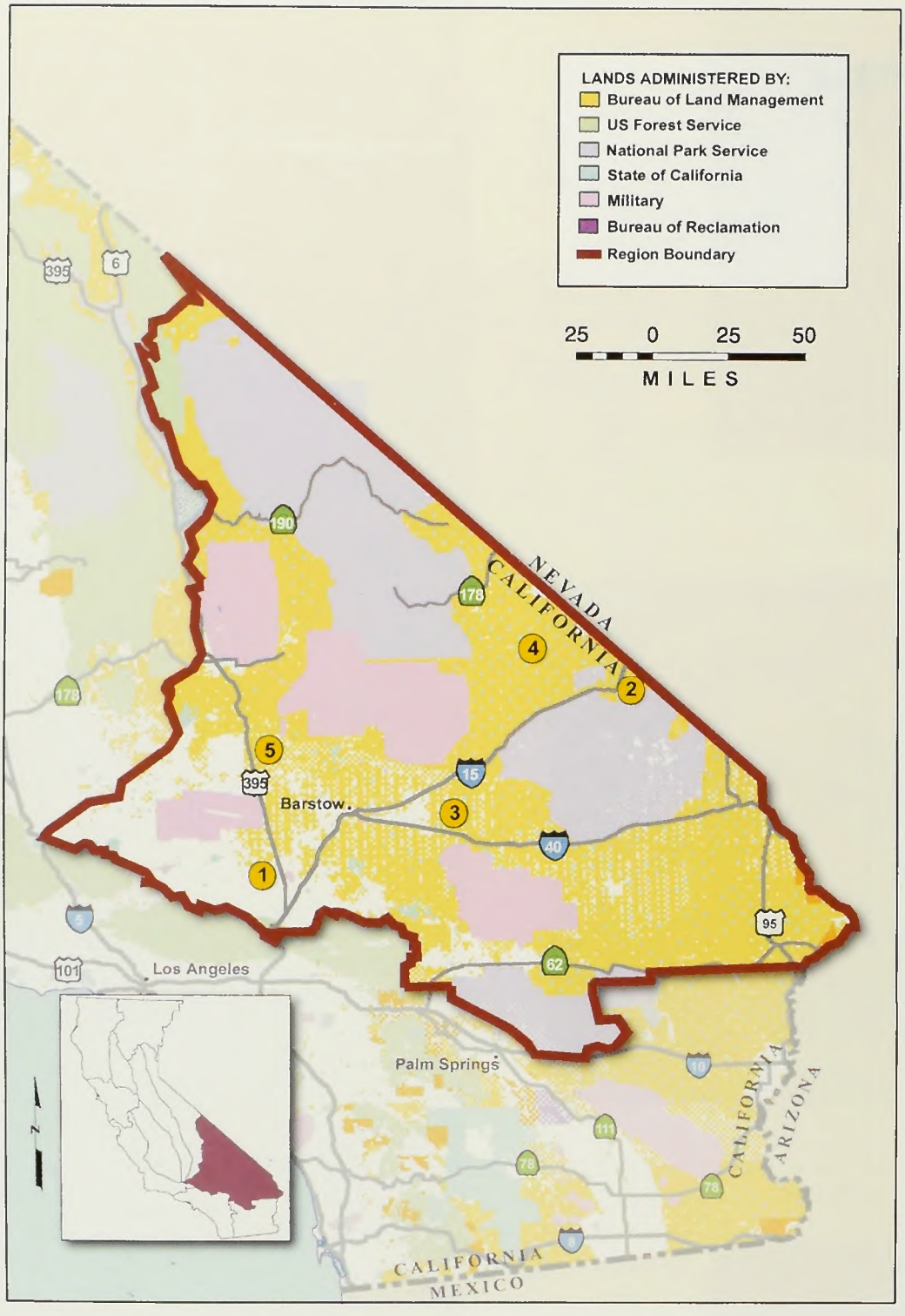
Provide protection, development and use of public lands and preserve the natural and cultural resources without destroying the sense of freedom and solitude cherished by most desert users.

Partnerships

California Conservation Corps
Friends of El Mirage
Friends of Ivanpah
Ridgecrest Steering Committee
Friends of Jawbone
California Route 66 Association
Resource Conservation District
National Fish & Wildlife Foundation
Lone Pine Interagency Visitor Center
Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee
Interagency Shooting Range
Riparian Restoration Projects
Desert Discovery Center
Together for the Desert
Desert Survivors
Indian Wells Valley
Sand Canyon Environmental Ed Program
E Clampus Vitas
State of CA - Wildlife Conservation Board
Inyo School District
Honda
Public Lands Information Association
California Off-Road Vehicle Association
Smitty's Desert Riders
County of San Bernardino

Key Assets of the Mojave Desert

- Wilderness Areas
- Patton Camps
- Desert Tortoise Natural Area
- Amargosa Canyon Country
- El Mirage and Ivanpah Dry Lakes
- Harper Dry Lake Marsh
- Afton Canyon



1. El Mirage Dry Lake
2. Ivanpah Dry Lake
3. Afton Canyon
4. Amargosa Canyon Country
5. Desert Tortoise Natural Area

Mojave Desert

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